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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 7053
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5059
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3185
RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO 5017
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 1296
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0557
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4124
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9405
RUEHB/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 6707
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 1222
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000728

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB
USAID/DCHA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [FAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: RESOLUTION OF CHILD SOLDIERS ISSUE IN SIGHT

REF: COLOMBO 000229

Classified By: A/DCM REBBECA W. COHN. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. A/DCM, Poloff, and USAID met with UNICEF Representative and Protection Officer on July 17 to discuss GSL progress on facilitating release and rehabilitation of TMVP and LTTE child soldiers. UNICEF shared their data on under-age recruitment and noted progress on a number of fronts. The Government of Sri Lanka acting through the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation has developed a new rehabilitation center for 454 former LTTE child soldiers in Vavuniya with UNICEF financial and technical support. UNICEF collaborated on an information campaign with the GSL that has had an important impact and changed perceptions of the need to rehabilitate child soldiers. Memoranda of Understanding and a tripartite agreement with the GSL in UNICEF's view demonstrate GSL commitment to resolving the child soldier issue. Importantly, TMVP underage recruiters in Batticaloa have been arrested by the police. Challenges remain, but the focus has turned from underage recruitment to providing rehabilitation and tracing outstanding cases: 63 LTTE and 24 TMVP. UNICEF assesses that the GSL is fully committed to the goal of eliminating child soldiers and that a complete resolution of this problem could be possible by the end of the year. UNICEF observed that support from the United States has been a crucial factor in achieving this progress. End Summary.

GSL Fully Engaged

¶2. (SBU) A/DCM, Poloff and USAID met with UNICEF on July 17 to discuss GSL progress on child soldiers. Phillippe Duamelle, UNICEF's Representative in Sri Lanka, reported that the GSL is fully engaged on child soldiers. UNICEF staff said that while the Security Council would be unlikely to delist the TVMP, considerable progress has been achieved and it was reasonable to expect a complete end to the child soldier problem in Sri Lanka by the end of the year. UNICEF credits

the US's active engagement on this, as well as the championing of this issue by key Sri Lankans, with bringing about the GSL's change of perspective and forward movement on this issue.

¶3. (SBU) UNICEF gave particular credit to Justice Secretary and Commissioner of Rehabilitation, Suhada Gamalath. Gamalath has conducted a vigorous public awareness campaign and worked to transmit the GSL's zero tolerance message down to the operational level. At least one former TMVP recruiter has been arrested, a charge that has a 30 year jail term. Other recruiters have been warned of the need to surrender the 24 outstanding TMVP underage children or face police arrest. Importantly, both Minister of Reconciliation Karuna, and Eastern Province Chief Minister Pillaiyan agree that the 4 to 5 remaining TMVP recruiters should be dealt with by the police authorities.

¶4. (SBU) UNICEF noted that Gamalath has ensured that the GSL's actions have been in accordance with obligations under Security Council Resolution 1612 which covers the period from 15 September 2007 to 31 January 2009. In particular, UNICEF observed that the GSL's December Emergency Decree took the correct tone of rehabilitation over criminalization of former child soldiers and stressed the importance of this stance. Prior to entering the rehabilitation camps, the children must be interviewed by a magistrate who has seen the proposed relocation site. The magistrate also must produce a document that authorizes a three month stay, which can be renewed for a further three times, leading to a maximum rehabilitation

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time of one year.

Making Progress in the North

¶5. (SBU) UNICEF staff said they have what they consider to be an accurate and comprehensive database on child soldiers in the north. None of the 454 child soldiers (299 males and 155 females) they have recently identified was previously in their database. They said there was a large spike in LTTE recruitment in February and March. They have been unable to account for 63 children who were in UNICEF's database and are now presumed dead. UNICEF is attempting to correlate the 1356 children in their database who were recruited as children but are now over 18 with the 10,000 plus former combatants that ICRC has registered. Government restrictions on access to this information has made this more difficult.

¶6. (SBU) UNICEF reported that former child soldiers have been extremely impressed with their reception in the rehabilitation camps and that this has been an important confidence building measure to reassure them that they will be rehabilitated rather than criminalized. UNICEF staff pointed out that while rehabilitation might seem inappropriate given the short length of the time some of them served as child soldiers, the camps offer additional protection for the children. There are currently two rehabilitation camps, a large one in Vavuniya with 454 former LTTE children and a smaller one in Ambepussa for 130 former LTTE as well as former TMVP underage combatants. NOTE: USAID has an ongoing \$250,000 grant with UNICEF to support the Ambepussa rehabilitation center.

Wrapping Up in the East

¶7. (SBU) UNICEF said that there had been a great deal of progress in the East with TMVP underage combatants and that more should be made in the coming weeks. According to their numbers, there are approximately 24 open TMVP cases. The GSL has informed UNICEF that the leadership of the TMVP groups have agreed that four or five currently known recruiters should be arrested and the police are working to do so as soon as possible.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: UNICEF had a positive view of both the GSL's intentions and actions on addressing child soldiers. Post shares UNICEF's positive assessment of the role that Secretary Gamalath has played as an engaging and responsive partner on this issue. Post assesses that the end of the year is a realistic target for resolving the child soldier issue and will continue to work with the GSL toward that goal.

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